

General rules:

1) You **can not** use singular countable nouns alone. You need to define them (use **a, the, this, that, some, my**, etc.).

Be careful of **the** dog! (*we mean some specific dog*)
She has **a** black dog. (*we mention it for the first time*)

2) In some cases, you need to use the indefinite article, if you can replace it with "**one**", and the definite article, if you can replace it with "**that**".

He has **a** daughter = She has **one** daughter.
Give me **the** battery = Give me **that** battery.

3) You **can not** use the indefinite article (a, an) with **plural** or **uncountable** nouns.

Indefinite Article

There are 2 types of the indefinite article: **a** and **an**

a is used before consonants: a table, a chair

an is used before a vowels: an apricot, an egg, an intelligent man

But:

You need to use "**an**" before "h" if it is not pronounced: an honest man, an hour
You need to use "**a**" before "u" if it is pronounced like [ju]: a uniform, a used car.

Important: the indefinite article can be used **only** with a) countable nouns and b) singular nouns.

You can't use it before nouns like "milk, advice, information" (*uncountable nouns*) or "students", "children" (*nouns in plural*).

A boy (*singular, countable*) but boys (*plural*)

A cup of tea (*singular, countable*), but tea (*uncountable*)

When you need to use the indefinite article:

1) Before a noun that we mention **for the first time, an unspecified person, thing or event**

I am going to buy **a** hat.

Is there **a** hotel near here? **BUT:** We enjoyed our holiday. **The** hotel was really nice.
(we mean the specific hotel)

2) In the **meaning of "one" or "one of"**

I'd like **a** glass of water.

I'd like **a** tea please! (*meaning "one cup of tea"*).

She is **a** colleague of John (*John has many colleagues*).

3) Before a countable noun that is **preceded by an adjective**.

It is **a** nice flat.

I need **a** new car.

Have **a** good time! **BUT**: I don't have **time** (*in this situation, time is uncountable*).

We had **a** wonderful trip! **BUT**: It was **truly amazing travel** (*trip is countable, but travel is uncountable*)

4) After **WHAT** in exclamations

What **a** beautiful view! **BUT**: What **beautiful scenery** (*scenery is uncountable*).

What **an** interesting film!

What **a** good suggestion! **BUT**: What **good advice!** (*advice is uncountable*)

5) After **SUCH**, if we want to intensify the meaning

This is such **a** difficult issue!

My new boss is such **an** arrogant man!

BUT: It is such **wonderful weather** (*because weather is uncountable*)

6) When we speak about **professions, religions and nationalities**.

He is **a** doctor. **BUT**: She went to **the** doctor (*her usual doctor*)

She is **a** sales representative.

He is **an** American (*noun*). It is **also possible** to say: He is **American** (*adjective*).

She is **a** Buddhist (*noun*). It is **also possible** to say: She is **Buddhist** (*adjective*).

7) When we express **amounts of things**.

She comes twice **a** day.

He drove 80 kilometres **an** hour.

They receive about 25 **a** week (or per week).

It costs 3 dollars **a** kilo (or per kilo).

Definite Article

The use of the definite article:

1) Before a noun when you mean something or somebody **specific**.

I'd like to speak to **the** manager. (*You mean the manager of this shop*).

We had a very nice meal last night. **The** fish was very good. (*You mean the fish you ate last night*)

He spilled **the** juice all over the floor (*here you mean some specific juice, perhaps the juice you needed for breakfast*)

BUT: He spilled **juice** all over the floor (*just juice*).

2) Before a noun **which has already been mentioned**, i.e. the listener (or the reader) knows what exactly the speaker (or the writer) means.

I had a sandwich and an apple for breakfast. **The** sandwich was a bit stale, but **the** apple was sweet and juicy.

3) Before a noun which describes **a unique thing, object or title**.

The moon goes round **the** earth, and **the** earth goes round **the** sun.

I like to look at the stars in **the** sky.

The internet has changed our life style.

People need to protect **the** environment.

Have you ever crossed **the** equator?

The North Pole is the northernmost point on the Earth, lying diametrically opposite **the** South Pole.

The Queen will visit our city!

BUT: We can use "**Earth**" without the (if we mean that it is a planet in space, like Mars, Venus etc.) and we can use **space** without the definite article.

Which planet is closest to **Earth**?

There are millions of stars in **space**.

4) Before **ordinal numbers: the first, the sixth, the eleventh...**

John lives on **the** third floor.

5) With **superlatives of adjectives**.

The best person, **the** most important.

He is **the** finest young player.

6) In the expression "**the same**".

Your dress is **the** same colour as mine.
Are these cars **the** same?

7) In some **time expressions**

in **the** past
in **the** present
in **the** future

in **the** morning
in **the** afternoon
in **the** evening

at **the** beginning
at **the** moment
for **the** time being
all **the** while

I am sorry, I can't speak to you at **the** moment.
We played tennis in **the** morning.

8) In some **place expressions**.

at **the** top
at **the** end
in **the** middle
on **the** right
on **the** left

in **the** north
in **the** south
in **the** west
in **the** east

The table is in **the** middle of the room.
The most densely populated region in **the** south-west of the United Kingdom.
He lives in **the** north of Brazil. BUT: He lives in **northern Brazil** (without the).

9) For the nouns **followed by "of-phrases"** or by a **descriptive subordinate clause**

There are many interesting places in **the** countries of Central Europe.
Ancient Greeks believed in **the** healing power of honey.

It is **the** man we saw yesterday!

10) Before some public places (go to **the cinema, the theatre, the bank, the post office, the station, the airport**):

I never go to **the** theatre but I often go to **the** cinema.

Are you going to **the** bank? **BUT**: Is there **a** bank near here? (*doesn't matter which bank*)

He is at **the** airport now.

11) Before the **names of hotels, theatres, museums, cinemas, galleries, sights**.

He will stay in **the** Sheraton. (hotel)

They visited **the** Kremlin.

I enjoyed my visit of **the** Guggenheim Museum.

Did you go up **the** Eiffel Tower?

12) In the phrases **go to the doctor, the dentist**.

I don't like going to **the** dentist. **BUT**: He works as **a** dentist (*here his profession is meant*)

She went to **the** doctor.

13) Before **groups of people**: nations, families.

The Chinese invented printing.

The Smiths live close to us.

14) Before **a specific type of animal or machine**.

The giraffe is the tallest of all animals. **BUT**: We saw **a** giraffe at the zoo (*we mean one giraffe*)

The bicycle is an excellent means of transport. **BUT**: I go to work by **bus**.

15) Before **nouns which were made of adjectives**.

We must care about **the** old.

The state provides loans for **the** unemployed.

Do you think **the** rich should pay higher taxes?

Our government needs to do more to help **the** homeless.

16) Before **musical instruments**

Laura plays **the** flute and **the** piano.

I want to learn how to play **the** guitar.

17) Before "**radio**".

I listen to **the** radio a lot. **BUT:** I watch **television** a lot (zero article).

18) **Newspaper titles and books (The Independent, The Sunday Times).**

I've read **The** Firm by John Grisham.

19) **Canals, rivers, seas, oceans.**

The Suez Canal is an artificial waterway in Egypt.

The Thames is a river in England.

We visited **the** Mediterranean Sea.

We will travel to **the** Black Sea.

Have you been to **the** Pacific Ocean?

20) **Geographical areas** (groups of countries) or compass points

The Middle East, **the** Far East, **the** Asia, **the** West

He travelled all over **the** Middle East.

21) **Forests**

Have you been to **the** Black Forest?

22) **Deserts (the Sahara , the Gobi desert)**

I dream to see **the** Sahara some day.

Zero Article (No Article)

We use no article:

1) When we talk about **things, ideas or people in general.**

I don't eat **meat**.

Life is not possible without **oxygen**.

I like writing **letters**.

I don't like **cold weather**.

I like **classical music**. **BUT:** The film wasn't very interesting, but I liked **the** music
(*the speaker means the music in the film*).

Children learn from playing. **BUT:** We took **the** children to the zoo (*the speaker means specific children*)

2) Before **names** of people.

John Brown lived next door.

3) Before **days of the week and months**.

We will stay in London till **Wednesday**.

He will come back in **July**.

4) Before **times of the day and night (midday, midnight, noon)**

I would like it finished by **midday**.

Midnight came soon. **BUT:** In **the** afternoon

5) Before **meals (breakfast/ lunch/ dinner)**

What did you have for **breakfast**?

Dinner is ready!

6) Before "**home**" and "**work**"

I am going **home**.

Are you going out tonight? - I am staying at **home**.

I'm going to **work** now.

What time do you usually finish **work**?

7) Before some official places (**school, college, university, hospital, prison, church**)

What did you learn at **school**? **BUT:** Jane's mother went to **the** school to see her English teacher (*we mean a specific building*).

He wants to go to **university**.

Charles had an accident. He had to go to **hospital**.

David goes to **church** on Sundays. **BUT:** Two masters went to **the** church to repair the wall (*We mean a specific building*)

John's friend is in **prison** for robbery. **BUT:** John went to **the** prison to visit his friend (*He is a visitor, not a prisoner*).

8) Before means of **transport** and **communication** (**by bus, by train, by car, by taxi, by plane, by email, by phone**)

Usually I go to work by **bus**.
I will contact you by **email**.

9) Before **next** and **last**

I am not working **next** Thursday.
I travelled to Greece **last** summer.

10) Before phrases that consist of **noun+number**

Our train leaves from **Platform 11**.
Do you have such shoes in **size 42**?
We stayed in **Room 22**.

11) Before **sports and games**

He played **football** and **basketball**.

12) Before **academic subjects and languages**

He studies **mathematics, biology** and **physics**.
Do you think **English** is difficult?

I am interested in **history**. **BUT**: I am interested in **the** history of my country (*of-phrase*)

13) Before **names of companies** and **airlines**.

We visited the office of **Fiat**.
I often fly **Singapore Airlines**.

14) Before **continents**.

Have you been to **Africa** or **South America**?

15) Before **countries** (**except plural: the** Netherlands, **the** Philippines, **the** United States of America, **the** United Kingdom and **except republics: the** Republic of Ireland, **the** Dominican Republic)

We stayed in **Italy**.
She came back from **Mexico**.

16) Before names of **cities, towns**.

London is the capital of the United Kingdom.
She lived in **Paris**.

17) Before names of **streets and roads** (except **The** High Street, **The** Strand)

Sherlock Holmes lived at **Baker Street**.
She lives at **Green Road**.

18) Before names of **airports, stations, universities, castles**.

Welcome to **Kennedy Airport!**
Last summer we visited **Edinburgh Castle**.
He will apply to **Cambridge University**.

19) Before **lakes** (except groups of lakes like **the** Great Lakes)

Lake Erie is located in Canada. **BUT:** They live near **the** lake.

20) Before **mountains** (except mountain chains **the** Andes, **the** Rockies)

He dreamt to climb **Mount Everest**.
They liked **Mount Fuji** so much.

21) Before names of **islands** (except island chains: **the** Aleutians, **the** Canary Islands)

Last year he visited **Easter Island**.
We want to go to **Maui**.